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Vicksburg Reservist helps Iraqis rebuild their country

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Baghdad, Iraq — A Mississippi Army Reservist is among those helping rebuild Iraq. 1st Lt. Dawn Harrison, who grew up in Vicksburg, is overseeing \$45 million in construction for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer Project Engineer on several new structures in Baghdad including the Academy of Health and Science, the Secure Documents Facility, and the Al Mamoon telecommunications complex.

"These structures directly benefit the Iraqi people and are among hundreds of such projects our staff is overseeing to improve essential services and help turn this country around," she said. "Our workload is demanding averaging 12 hours each day. But I do enjoy the job ... interacting with the Iraqis, learning their culture and customs, just being part of this effort to help them establish a democracy."

She points out her projects deal with a variety of engineering challenges including excavation, backfilling, foundations, erecting steel columns, rebar, and concrete placement. "In some areas, we started with an empty lot full of brush and weeds, in others we had to remove a bombed-out structure, but in all cases we're helping the Iraqis build their future. I studied at Mississippi State University to be a civil engineer and this is exactly the kind of work I wanted to do. Every day is a learning opportunity and there's no question the experience I've had here would take 5 to 10 years to accumulate stateside."

The \$4.6 million Academy of Health and Sciences is comprised of two 800-sq.-meter, single-story buildings which will feature classrooms, an auditorium, library, cafeteria and kitchen. That new facility will train students interested in becoming healthcare providers. It will also feature a fully-functioning health clinic including treatment rooms, dental exam rooms, a pharmacy, x-ray room, and a vaccination area. "That structure is very important because it's where future doctors and nurses will train as well a facility where local residents can get medical care."

The \$1.8 million Secure Documents Storage Facility will provide a safe storage area for courthouse documents including records from the Saddam Hussein trials. The 2500-square-meter structure will be climate-controlled with an administrative area as well as six 12.5-by-25 meter storage vaults

with masonry walls and a concrete ceiling. The \$22.7 million Al Mamoon Exchange and Telecommunication Center will serve as a hub through which Iraq can connect to the world.

The Ministry of Communication offices will be located there as well as a 1300-square-meter post office. The seven-story structure will also feature a 200-seat auditorium, a cafeteria capable of serving 150 people, an exhibition hall, numerous conference rooms, several floors of communication switch gear providing phone service to Baghdad residents, a 250-car covered garage and parking for 10 mail delivery vans.



Iraqi workers prepare to place concrete at the Academy of Health and Science in Baghdad [Army Photo]



1st Lt. Dawn Harrison, [Army Photo]

Iraqi contractors don't necessarily follow the same standards we follow in the United States. That's where mentoring plays a key role and for the most part they're very receptive. They're proud of their work and want to do the best job possible. As the Project Engineer, one of my priorities is safety and we stress PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for all construction workers such as hard hats and boots."

One unique aspect about her assignment is that Harrison's team consists of three females -- two Iraqi quality assurance representatives and herself. One is a 28-year-old civil engineer, the other a 36-year-old mechanical engineer. "They're smart, detail oriented, and they learn. Iraqi women don't normally get an opportunity to be on a work site as they're usually assigned office duties such as design. We've got great camaraderie and the contractors respect the knowledge we bring to the job."

Harrison is assigned to the 412th Engineer Command Army Reserve unit in Vicksburg. In her civilian job, she's an engineer with Southern Consultants Inc., Jackson, MS. "I was overseeing the expansion of a 2-lane road into a 4-lane road when I got the call that I would be deploying in three days. My mother ended up closing up my Jackson apartment, boxing up all my belongings and putting them in storage for the year I'm serving in Iraq. I'm grateful for all the support I've received from both my employer and my family. They've been great."

The 5-foot 5-inch 26-year-old is the daughter of Audrey Harrison of Vicksburg.



Bagdad's new Secure Documents Storage Facility now under construction [Army Photo]

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